

GRP Questions and Answers

July 16, 2007

Q. What is the Grassland Reserve Program?

A. The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program that helps landowners and operators restore and protect grassland, including rangeland, shrubland and pastureland, and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program emphasizes support for working grazing operations; enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity; and protection of grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs under threat of conversion to cropping, urban development, and other activities that threaten grassland resources. The program is administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA), in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service.

Q. What are the goals of the program?

A. The program goals are to help conserve, restore and protect two million acres of grassland, rangeland, shrubland and pastureland by purchasing easements, entering into long-term rental agreements, and providing technical and financial assistance to participants for restoring the functions and values of grasslands and shrublands.

Q. What land is eligible?

A. GRP is available on privately owned lands and Tribal lands, including grassland; land that contains forbs or shrubs (including improved rangeland and pastureland); or land that is located in an area that historically has been dominated by grassland, forbs, and shrubs and has potential to provide habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value if the land is retained in its current use or restored to a natural condition. Incidental lands may be included to allow for the efficient administration of a rental agreement or easement, as determined by the NRCS State Conservationist.

Q. Is there a limit on the number of acres a landowner may enroll in the program?

A. There is no national maximum limitation on the amount of land that may be offered for the program. However, there is a minimum requirement established in law. Offers for the Limited Resource and Beginning Farmer enrollment must contain at least 20 contiguous acres, unless

special circumstances exist to accept a lesser amount. These special circumstances are determined by the NRCS State Conservationist.

Q. Who may participate in the program?

A. Both landowners and operators may participate on rental and restoration agreements. Operators may participate on rental agreements only when they provide evidence that they will have control of the property for the length of the agreement and have landowner concurrence.

Q. Could the Adjusted Gross Income provision of the 2002 Farm Bill impact my participation in GRP?

A. Yes, if you are an individual or entity that has an average adjusted gross income exceeding \$2.5 million for the three tax years immediately preceeding the application year, you are not eligible to receive program benefits or payments. However, an exemption is provided in cases where 75 percent of the adjusted gross income is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry operations.

Q. What enrollment options exist?

A. Enrollment options are: 10-year, 15-year, or 20-year rental agreements

Q. What are the requirements of the GRP?

A. All enrollment options permit:

- Common grazing practices that maintain the vitality of the grassland;
 - Haying, mowing, or harvesting for seed production, subject to certain restrictions during the nesting season (April 15 – August 15 in Tennessee), as determined by NRCS; and
 - Fire rehabilitation and construction of fire breaks and fences.
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- GRP rental agreements and easements prohibit production of crops (other than hay) that require breaking the soil surface, as well as fruit trees and vineyards; and any other activity that would disturb the surface of the land, except for appropriate land management activities included in a grassland resource management plan. Participants will be required to follow a grassland resource management plan developed by NRCS (or a designated third party) and the participant to preserve the integrity of the grassland.

Q. Is land enrolled in GRP subject to conservation compliance and swampbuster?

A. Yes, persons interested in participating in GRP must comply with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation compliance provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act, as amended.

Q. How do I apply for the program?

A. To participate, interested persons submit an application to their local NRCS or FSA office in the local USDA Service Center. Applications for the program are accepted at any time. The sign up period in Tennessee for the Limited Resource and Beginning Farmer enrollment is July 16 – August 3, 2007

Q. How will my application be evaluated for funding?

A. Each State will establish ranking criteria that will prioritize enrollment of working grasslands. The ranking criteria will consider threats of conversion, including cropping, invasive species, urban development, and other activities that threaten plant and animal diversity on grazing lands.

Q. Are lands containing non-native plant species eligible?

A. Lands containing both native and non-native grass and forbs are eligible for protection and restoration under GRP. The protection of declining native plant communities may receive priority points for protection under GRP through State developed ranking criteria.

Q. How is the contract value determined?

A. For 10-, 15-, and 20-year rental agreements, the participant receives not more than 75 percent of the grazing value in an annual payment for the length of the agreement. Grazing values will be determined based on local prevailing rental rates.

Q. Can GRP agreements be terminated to enroll lands in other conservation programs?

A. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis by the NRCS State Conservationist in consultation with the FSA State Executive Director.

For More Information

If you need more information about GRP, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district.

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.